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NOTES AND QUERIES.

THE ELVES OF OLD MEXICO. — [The following data were extracted from a manuscript by Miss Mary Blake of Mexico City, relating to the belief in duendes in Mexico. They were given to her by Luciano Muñoz, aged seventy-three, a native of the State of Leon, Mex.]

How the Elves punished a Quarrelsome Man. — In former times there was a ranch called "La Loma de Bufanda," which I think still exists under that name. The owner had good land; and he had two large barns, — one for wheat, and the other for hay. Near the barns was a house where the overseer, José Maria Ruga, lived. The household consisted of José, his wife, two sons, and two daughters. One son was a cowherd, the other a shepherd. Now, this family knew that duendes inhabited the barn which held hay. They had sometimes caught glimpses of them, and they described them as lightly-clad children of diminutive stature. The shepherd was a gentle lad, who had made himself a rude musical instrument like a flute; and on Sundays and holy days he often sat among the haystacks in the barn, and played little tunes to the elves. He would hear childish giggles of delight, quickly suppressed, followed by stealthy footsteps toward him; but he rarely saw the little ones on these occasions. At the close of the concert, a half-eaten fruit or a bright-colored pebble, and sometimes a live frog or a harmless little snake, was dropped at his feet. The elves were like small boys in their tastes, and gave the shepherd the things most prized by themselves. Once there was a dance given at La Loma, and to this there came from a neighboring ranch a man who was of the most quarrelsome. He began by asking the shepherd's betrothed to dance. When she refused, — for of course no respectable girl cares to dance with other than her promised husband, — he insisted, and tried to pull her from her seat. Then the cowherd, who stood near, said, "Friend, this maiden is betrothed to my brother. Find thyself another partner." At that, the quarrelsome fellow, whose head had been heated by drink, answered, "I dance with whom I please," and pushed the cowherd aside so violently that the overseer's son fell against a stone bench and cut his cheek. The girl screamed, and hid her face in her scarf; while all the young men with one accord hustled the brawler from the courtyard, where the dance was going on, to the haybarn, into which they thrust him and locked the door, saying, "There canst thou pass the night, dancing with whichever lady-mouse pleases thee." With much laughter they returned to the dance, leaving the quarrelsome man to kick at the door and shout maledictions. At last the fellow grew tired of this occupation, and, lying down upon the hay, he fell asleep. In a short time he awoke with a scream from a dream of being buried alive, to find himself completely covered with the hay. He shook himself free from it, and composed himself to sleep again; but no sooner had he closed his eyes than great bundles of hay fell on him. "There are other prisoners in the barn," thought the quarrelsome man; and he called in a loud voice, "Who are you, and where are you?" There was no answer. The man, as was his wont, began to shout insults, which were answered by a perfect shower of hay. He groped around the immense building among the stacks,

but he found no one. At last he lay down again, and was again nearly smothered. He knew his tormentors then, and began to plead, "Dear duendes, pretty little duendes, let me sleep!" He could go no further, for a fistful of hay was suddenly thrust into his mouth. He was half-strangled, and each of his painful coughs brought a peal of laughter from the surrounding darkness. When he had recovered a little, he exclaimed, "Unless you little brutes leave me alone, I shall set fire to the hay, even if I myself perish with you!" Now, this was a threat that the man was powerless to put into effect, as he had nothing with which to make a fire; but the elves were so frightened that they were perfectly quiet after that, and just before dawn the quarrelsome man fell asleep. The young men came early to release the prisoner, who was mightily shaken by the night he had passed. He related what had happened; and all, narrator as well as listeners, found the account so interesting, that they went off to drink coffee together, and to astonish the women with the tale.

How the Elves helped on Moving-Day. — A family were troubled by duendes, who had taken possession of their house. For this reason they decided to move. While they were travelling along with their household utensils, the mother exclaimed to her eldest daughter, "We have forgotten the broom!" At once they saw a duende astride their pig, holding the broom across his knees. He told them that the duendes were moving with the family: therefore the family moved back to their former quarters.

How Elves may be Subdued. — Duendes may be driven away in the following manner. Instead of putting away the dishes in the kitchen, place them each night ready for use, with corn-meal dough on the metate. "My grandmother did this, and there was never any more disturbance," said a wise old woman to the narrator of the above. — Whenever anything disagreeable occurs, say aloud, "This is for the duendes." For instance, if you cut your finger, stumble on stones, or are seized with cramp, say, "This cut (or this fall or this pain) is for the duendes." A family is said to have done this, and within a week the little folk took their departure; but the hens laid fewer eggs, their pepper-fields bore less, and the pig grew thin, after that.

How the Elves put a Holy Father and his Sacristan to Flight. — In the ranch of San Jeronimo, jurisdiction of San Francisco del Rincon, many old houses were full of elves. In one house in particular the sprites were riotous from eight at night until dawn. The master of the house went to the priest of the nearest village and begged him to come and exorcise the spirits. The priest willingly consented; and the next night he arrived on horseback, with his sacristan mounted behind him, bearing all the articles necessary for the holy task. "Now, father," said the man of the house, as he helped the good man dismount, "my son will unsaddle and feed the horse, while you and the sacristan will have a bite to eat before the service." The three entered the house, and were soon seated upon a bench: while the man's wife placed before them three earthen dishes of pork cooked deliciously with green peppers, herbs, and olives; a pile of fresh tortillas; and three jugs of pulque (the national drink of Mexico, the juice of the maguey-plant). Each man rolled a tortilla to use as a spoon, and dipped it into his dish. Just as the little father had swallowed the first savory mouthful, a clamor of small voices began in the next room. He let his tortilla fall into his dish,

and asked, "Who is in there?" — "The duendes, father," answered the woman. "It is the hour when they begin their pranks." Just then there was a sound of metal being drawn back and forth over a stone. "What are they doing now?" inquired the sacristan. A shrill voice from within replied, "We are sharpening a knife which we shall use to cut off the priest's head." — "Saddle the horse and follow us with it!" cried the priest to the man of the house, as he started running down the road, dragging the sacristan after him. They continued to run knee-deep in dust, until they fell upon the moonlit road exhausted. There the man with the horse helped them, and assisted them to mount. The priest advised the horse-owner to sprinkle the home with the holy water. The man returned to his home, and sprinkled the holy water over the floors and walls of his two rooms; but the elves were never so boisterous as that night. The duendes never left that house, it is said. They seemed to bring prosperity to a house. It is certain that their hosts never lacked good food and raiment.

MARY BLAKE.

MEXICO, D.F.